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SUBJECT: MARCH 11 REGIONAL ELECTIONS: FINAL SNAPSHOT

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The results of the March 11 regional elections suggest that the success of the Kremlin's experiment in managed democracy has come at the (minor) expense of the United Russia (YR) party. For A Just Russia (SR) (the other Kremlin-backed party) and the Communist Party (KPRF) emerged from the regional contests satisfied with their comparatively strong, and in the case of the KPRF, surprising, results. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR was broadly weaker than in the last Duma election, but still on the board in most contests, leaving it, YR, SR, and the KPRF virtually certain to cross the threshold to representation in the December Duma elections. The prospects of the Union of Right Forces (SPS) are less certain, although the party's new-found populism and, some argue, a green light from the Kremlin allowed it to gain representation in four of the fourteen contests held March 11. Although SPS is contesting the results of some of the regional elections, decisions on its appeals are unlikely to cause major adjustments in the make-up of the regional legislatures. End summary.

United Russia: Victorious, But...

¶2. (SBU) Instead of elation, the Kremlin-sponsored United Russia's (YR) March 11 sweep of all fourteen regional races has produced some disappointment in the party. Regional leaders in Orel and Stavropol, where YR did worse than predicted, have been criticized and some have termed YR's lower than predicted numbers a "defeat" for the party. Despite 615.8 million rubles in financing (50 percent more than its most serious competitor, For A Just Russia) and near unfettered access to administrative resources, YR did more poorly in four regions (Leningrad, Orel, Samara, and Stavropol) than in the 2003 State Duma elections.

Just Russia: Pleasing Debut

¶3. (SBU) With a first place finish in Stavropol (although YR's strong showing in the region's single-mandate races ultimately allowed it to claim victory) and a second-place finish in five other regions, the Kremlin-sanctioned party For A Just Russia (SR) has positioned itself to be YR's chief rival in the December State Duma elections. Helping SR get on the scoreboard just four months after being created were established membership lists (SR was fashioned from three, pre-existent parties -- Rodina, the Russian Party of Pensioners, and the Russian Party of Life), ready access to the media, prominent national and regional politicians, deep

pockets, and limited access to administrative resources.

14. (SBU) In a post-election conversation, SR International Department Director Mikhail Demurin told us that votes for his newly-fledged party had come from former YR supporters and those opposed to YR's continued dominance. Demurin agreed that SR had failed to accomplish part of its mission, which reportedly was to subtract votes from the Communist Party (KPRF).

KPRF: Strategy Validated

15. (SBU) The KPRF was buoyed by its higher-than-expected election results (reftel). Mercator Group President Dmitriy Oreshkin agreed that KPRF's performance had been the one election surprise. KPRF Deputy Chairman Ivan Melnikov asserted that the party on March 11 had increased its share of the vote from 10 - 15 percent to 15 - 20 percent. KPRF's improvement in the polls has been variously traced to protest votes, the party's traditionally disciplined voters, and a degree of success in getting young people to the polls. KPRF's forceful protests of the initial results in Dagestan, where it was originally reported to have won 6.79 percent of the vote, led to a recount, which got it over the seven percent threshold and into the regional legislature, making it the only party to join YR in all fourteen legislatures.

LDPR: Not "Too Bad"

16. (SBU) LDPR Duma Deputy Aleksey Mitrofanov summarized the party's results as "not bad." (The party won representation in 11 regional legislatures, but polled somewhat more poorly than it had in earlier elections.) Mitrofanov was pleased,

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however, that LDPR had exceeded ten percent in most contests and nudged the 14 percent mark in others. The one shock had been Moscow region, where LDPR polled 6.81 percent. Mitrofanov termed the tally "suspicious," since early returns had suggested LDPR would win eight percent.

SPS: Not Quite a Contender

17. (SBU) The Union of Right Forces (SPS) narrowly failed to cross the seven percent threshold in three of the nine regions in which it was registered and won representation in four. Its mixed results on March 11 leave SPS's prospects for representation in the Duma after the December elections uncertain. SPS insiders attribute the party's improved performance to its newfound emphasis on social issues. Others argue that the party success is traceable to an understanding with the Kremlin. If so, the mysterious disappearance of votes in the Leningrad region re-count and the party's electoral problems in Moscow and Orel suggest that the nature of that understanding is not well understood by all.

Comment

18. (SBU) The March 11 results suggest the successful realization of the Kremlin's plan for a managed democracy, although it appears at this juncture to be five parties, not two, that are being managed. Shaping the March 11 races were 2006 changes to the electoral law that constrained political debate, eliminated minimal voter turnout requirements, and toughened party registration requirements. Also critical to the outcome were the decisions of regional election commissions not to register parties for the elections,

sometimes on somewhat flimsy grounds. YR was forced to pay a price -- although the cost was modest -- of being the governing party. SR's respectable finish should end some of the local squabbling that has accompanied its appearance, and turn it into a draw for local politicians and officials not admitted to YR's inner circle.

Results by Region in Moscow Consular District

19. (U) Percentages in the party list votes for regions in the Moscow Consular District are below:

Dagestan Republic (fluid results):

United Russia	63.67
Just Russia	10.68
Agrarian Party	9.12
KPRF	7.22
Patriots of Russia	7.07

LDPR	0.81

Komi Republic

United Russia	36.18
Just Russia	15.49
KPRF	14.26
LDPR	13.60
SPS	8.80

Moscow Region

United Russia	49.57
KPRF	18.61
Just Russia	8.86

SPS (contesting result)	6.90
LDPR	6.81
Yabloko	4.09
Patriots of Russia	2.05

Orel Region

United Russia	39.02
KPRF	23.78
Just Russia	12.60

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LDPR	7.34

SPS (contesting result)	6.98
Patriots of Russia	3.06
People's Will	2.09
Democratic Party of Russia	1.31

Samara Region

United Russia	33.54
KPRF	18.98
Just Russia	15.14
LDPR	11.59
SPS	8.11
Green Party	7.62

Patriots of Russia	1.38

Stavropol Region

Just Russia	37.64
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United Russia	23.87
KPRF	14.13
LDPR	11.80
SPS	7.73

Tomsk Region

United Russia	46.79
KPRF	13.37
LDPR	12.87
Just Russia	7.90
SPS	7.78

Patriots of Russia	3.75
Yabloko	3.65
Unity	1.06
RUSSELL	